

## A NEW WILDFLOWER GUIDE

Field Guide to Wildflowers of Northeastern and North Central North America. Roger Tory Peterson and Margaret McKenny. Houghton Mifflin, 1968. \$4.95

In the past decade there has been an increasing interest by the public in the identification of wild flowers, with consequent demand for a useful popular guide. Several successful bird guides have been published and it has seemed that the format of these could be imitated to produce a useful flower guide. The problem has turned out to be difficult. A standard bird guide lists all species east of the Rockies in about 300 pages. For a guide to be successful, financially, the publishers demand that as large a territory as possible be covered. The standard now seems to be the United States west to the Dakotas and south to North Carolina. This guide in addition includes parts of Ontario and Quebec. Even excluding grasses, sedges and other such plants, there are very many species in a territory of this size and most guides omit many, including some quite common ones. Thus Wherry includes 500 species with 428 illustrations. Peterson includes almost 1300 species with 1344 illustrations, which mean that anyone trying to identify a flower, especially in the northeastern part of the country, probably will find it listed in the guide. To achieve this admirable coverage in a pocket size guide, the descriptions are necessarily brief. Included are range, habitat, size and one or two key points. Those wishing a more complete description should refer to a more detailed guide.

As stated in the introduction, the book is designed for those people who are unable to use keys, but belong to the picture-matching school, which is the average amateur's approach to plant identification, and, except for checking the range, is about as far as most will go. The system is based on (1) color, (2) general shape or structure, (3) distinctions between similar species. For this last purpose only a leaf of the plant may be shown as in the case of some of the blue violets. Color is the basic approach, and to adhere to it the traditional procedure of arrangements

by families is abandoned. Thus the first part of the book consists of white flowers. Here for example are found all white orchids in one section, the wide-leaved orchids on one page, the spurred orchids on the next and the showy on the third. *Cypripedium acaule* appears here and also in the pink section of the book. In various other cases where there may be color confusion, flowers are listed twice. The color sections after white, are yellow, pink to red, violet to blue, orange, green and brown. Clearly in some cases a user would have to check 2 different color sections to locate a plant. All but a few of the plants are illustrated but many of the illustrations are line drawings with the color indicated at the top of the page and in the text. No doubt many users would prefer color for all illustrations, which, however, would presumably make the book much more expensive.

The procedure of having one family spread through several sections of the book seems strange at first sight. In practice, however, it is quite workable. A user, aware he had a Legume, would refer to the front of the book where there is a brief description of the Pea Family and page listings for the various colors which are readily checked. A user with *Desmodium canadense* should locate it without difficulty on the appropriate page and would probably correctly identify it. If he happened to have one of the other 9 *Desmodiums* listed he might well have one difficulty in making a determination although an effort is made to indicate key points. Of necessity a number of the *Desmodiums* are omitted but the selection seems to be reasonable. An effort is made to make the user aware of the significance of families. For each species, the family is indicated with a pictogram designed to call attention to a characteristic of the family. For the Legumes a generalized pea-like flower is used. The symbolism is varyingly successful, but the perceptive user is likely to acquire some appreciation of family.

Amateurs demand common names for plants. Many have become standard but in other cases it has been necessary

to supply them. The author has in some cases translated the scientific name and in others has endeavored to devise an appropriate one. It is to be hoped that widely recognized common names will come into general use for flowers as they have for birds and most trees and shrubs.

Some users will not find the color key always satisfactory with plants of intermediate hue being listed under a less familiar shade. The distinctions between closely related species, as in the Violets, are not always workable. These are minor criticisms. The book is excellent and sets new standards for popular guides. It also would be of considerable use to the professional botanist who might be working with unfamiliar groups in new territory.

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